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SUBJECT: Argentine Reponse to Distracted Driving Demarche

REF: 10 STATE 6703

¶1. ESTHOff delivered reftel demarche on February 2 to Sandra Campos, Director of Institutional Relations at Argentina's National Road Safety Agency (ANSV). Campos provided basic information about the law and public awareness campaigns related to distracted driving, but said that ANSV does not have statistics for accidents related to such behavior.

¶2. Argentina has a poor road safety record. According to the NGO "Luchemos por la Vida" (Fighting for Life), 7,885 people were killed in road accidents in 2009, an average of 22 per day. Official ANSV statistics are not available for 2009, but in 2008 ANSV statistics indicated that 7,552 people were killed (including pedestrians) in traffic accidents. Neither ANSV nor "Luchemos por la Vida" provide statistics or estimates for the percentage of accidents or deaths caused by distracted drivers.

¶3. Article 48(x) of National Law 24.449, passed in 1994, prohibits driving while using any earpiece or communication system with manual operation, and is interpreted to prohibit driving while talking on a cell phone or text messaging. However, hands-free devices are not covered by the law and may be used.

¶4. The City of Buenos Aires legislature passed a separate law in 2007 to ban writing or reading text messages while driving. Violators are subject to fines of between 200 and 2000 pesos (about USD 50-500). Drivers of buses, taxis, and trucks are subject to higher fines of 300-3000 pesos (about USD 75-750). The use of cell phones generally while driving is also illegal, with penalties of 100-1000 pesos (about USD 25-250). Under a new system implemented January 1, 2009, that applies only to drivers registered in the City of Buenos Aires, driving while using a cell phone or texting also earns the driver five points against his/her license (licenses are revoked after 20 points are accumulated).

¶5. ANSV was established only in April 2008 within the Interior Ministry, with the mission of reducing the national road accident rate. ANSV focuses on public education campaigns on road safety concerns, including seat belt wearing, speeding, and drunk driving. An ANSV official told ESTHOff that the agency's public information campaigns are currently heavily focused on distracted driving, particularly on the use of cell phones. It has created radio, television, and print ads specifically targeting cell phone use, though not text messaging. In late 2009, ANSV applied for a \$48 million IBRD loan to promote road safety, including enhanced road safety monitoring. The loan application is currently under World Bank review.

¶6. Argentina has already reached near cell phone saturation, with

cell phones used for the majority of communication. INDEC, the national statistics bureau, reported that there are 50.4 million cell phones in Argentina (for a population of 40.1 million). INDEC also reported that in September 2009 there were 4.3 billion calls initiated from cell phones, compared to only 1.7 billion made from land lines.

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